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26 October 1954

FRENCH-VIETNAMESE MILITARY STRENGTHS IN THE SAIGON AREA

French Expeditionary Corps strength in the Saigon area totals about 13,000 troops. This amounts to 14 infantry and 2 artillery battalions, organized into four mobile groups plus an independent infantry regiment. The mobile groups are composed largely of Moroccan, Algerian and Senegalese troops, and the independent regiment is also African. The French have in addition three Moroccan light cavalry battalions, equipped with half-tracks and armored cars, within an hour's distance of Saigon, and two airborne artillery and infantry battalions several miles north of the city.

The Vietnamese army, in contrast, has no units within Saigon proper. It has, however, 6 regular and 12 light infantry battalions, amounting to about 12,000 men, in various posts within one to three hours' distance of Saigon. Four of the 6 regular battalions are cadred by the French or have French advisers; the remainder of the regular battalions and all the light battalions have no French personnel. There is also a South Vietnam National Guard regiment, with some French personnel attached, nearby. These troops have no artillery and armored support.

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It is apparent, then, that the French have overwhelming superiority in troop quality and firepower in the Saigon area. They are in a position to assure, if they so choose, the status quo in Saigon and to prevent the entry of Vietnamese units into the city. The French, moreover, can exert their influence on the Vietnamese army in less obvious ways through their control of its logistical supplies and troop pay. A successful coup by General Dinh, therefore, would require at least the tacit approval of the French.

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